

## Post Event Report Summary for Independent Aging Agenda Event

Name of Event: “Aging in America: Personal Responsibility and the Role of Government”

Date of Event: July 15, 2005

Location of Event: University of Akron, Martin University Center, Akron, Ohio

Number of Persons Attending: 129

Sponsoring Organizations: Area Agency on Aging, 10B, Inc.- Akron, Ohio  
District XI Area Agency on Aging, Inc.- Youngstown, Ohio  
Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging, Inc.- Cleveland, Ohio

Contact Name: Kirk Davis

Telephone Number: 330-896-9172

E-mail: [kdavis@services4aging.org](mailto:kdavis@services4aging.org)

### **Priority Issue # 1: Planning Along the Lifespan**

Individuals must have an adequate income in retirement to ensure their health, well being and ability to care for themselves. This income should include Social Security, private pensions and individual savings.

Barriers:

1. Social Security is facing insolvency, which threatens the financial security of future generations who will rely on this source of retirement income.
2. Company pension plans are disappearing, leaving workers facing retirement without one leg of the three legged financial stool- savings, pensions, Social Security.
3. Many individuals do not start preparing financially for retirement until mid-life, which allows fewer years of wealth accumulation.
4. Medicare faces imminent insolvency. Without the health safety net provided through this vital program, the financial well being of older individuals is at risk as they bear greater costs for providing their own health care.

Solutions:

1. Social Security must be maintained as a social insurance program, which includes survivor and disability benefits. The insolvency issue should be solved by removing the cap on income that is taxed by Social Security. The eligibility age for Social Security should be raised to 68, with a phase-in.
2. Company pension plans must be protected. The government should sponsor legislation which protects pension plans and health benefits.

### **Priority Issue # 1: Planning Along the Lifespan, *continued***

- Solutions:
3. Financial literacy programs across all age groups should be developed and implemented.
  4. A bi-partisan commission to review Medicare and ensure its long term viability should be developed.

### **Priority Issue # 2: Health and Long Term Living**

Social and health systems must be in place that support individuals throughout the aging process, allowing quality of life through the promotion of healthy lifestyles, keeping needed medications at a reasonable cost, promoting innovation in long term care and creating an accessible and available system of long term care services.

- Barriers:
1. The health care system is geared towards acute care and managing chronic conditions, which are often preventable.
  2. Health care costs, especially prescription drugs, continue to rise at a higher rate than any other cost. This takes a greater toll on older adults who are high consumers of health care services.
  3. The Long Term Care System has moved slowly to develop new models of care delivery.
  4. Funding for Long Term Care delivery systems is focused on institutional care, rather than focusing on community services and consumer choice.

- Solutions:
1. Open channels for reimbursement for health screenings and inoculations and promote healthy lifestyles for consumers and professionals.
  2. Medicare must be able to negotiate for the best possible medication prices on behalf of beneficiaries. Restrictions should be removed that prohibit across-the-border medication purchases. Institute tax refunds for prescription medication purchases.
  3. Promote best practices in long term care delivery through additional federal development and demonstration grants. Consumers and professionals should better understand best practices in long term care service delivery.
  4. A truly seamless continuum of care should be developed. Remove Medicaid institutional bias by establishing reimbursement for all levels of care for eligible consumers.

### **Priority Issue # 3: Our Community**

The Older Americans Act has been the impetus for development of home and community based care systems which allow older individuals the opportunity to age in place. Community support systems must be in place that promote healthy aging, allow individuals a range and choice of services that meet individual needs.

### **Priority Issue # 3: Our Community, *continued***

- Barriers:**
1. The Older Americans Act has not been reauthorized or reappropriated.
  2. Promoting good health through healthy lifestyles is not viewed as a priority issue. Many do not see the connection between choice of lifestyle and impaired health status.
  3. Many communities are not “elder” or “disabled” friendly. With a growing number of older persons, communities need to assess themselves and invest as necessary.
  4. There needs to be a seamless system developed that is consumer centered and eliminates issues that complicate access to services.
- Solutions:**
1. Reauthorize the Older Americans Act (OAA) and increase funding for:  
National Family Caregiver Support Program: Double the funding to provide support for informal family caregivers.  
Title IIID: Disease Prevention/Health Promotion. It is important that all citizens, especially older persons, adopt healthy life styles. Title IIID of the OAA is a vehicle for the aging network to support and enhance the goals of Healthy People 2010. At the same time, in order to keep people at home and out of expensive institutional care, Congress should encourage and support the use of telehealth – health monitoring systems in the home and should study and publish best practices. Major causes of morbidity, chronic diseases are responsive to prevention and disease management.  
Title VII: Elder Rights. A growing number of older persons are at risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation. With decreasing funds and lack of support from some states, AoA must increase support for the most vulnerable. There should be the maximum flexibility allowed in the allocation of resources and provision of services under the Older Americans Act.
  2. Engage the Community in Aging Issues  
There is a need to encourage coalitions in each community to facilitate interaction between people and agencies and to increase involvement in aging issues, and recognize the needs of a growing older population.  
Find best practices for community awareness and action to create a “liveable” communities, publish them, and encourage communities to follow them.  
Address the needs of a diverse population. In the future, there will be a more diverse older population with cultural backgrounds that need to be understood in order to provide appropriate services.
  3. Services should be person centered—with consumer choice. There should be flexibility in allocation of resources and provision of services so that an older person receives the services they need. Requirements across funding sources should be rationalized so that a person can receive the services needed.
  4. Centralized information and referral services should be encouraged so that information is readily available and comprehensive and comprehensible.

#### **Priority Issue # 4: The Workplace of the Future and the Marketplace**

The profile of the working-age population is undergoing a substantial shift towards a greater number of older workers, which requires some adjustment to the workplace. The marketplace as it currently exists often prevents easy access to shopping and needed services for those without their own transportation.

Barriers:

1. Older workers are not seen as assets in the workplace. Aging biases create a lack of sensitivity to the needs of older workers.
2. Often older workers lack the skills to compete in a technology driven society.
3. Older workers often need flexible schedules to manage other responsibilities, such as caregiving.
4. Transportation systems lack coordination and sufficient funding to meet the varied needs of consumers.
5. Lack of transportation puts individuals at risk of isolation, health problems, and reduced mobility.

Solutions:

1. Aging sensitivity training should be available to company executives and younger workers so they understand the needs of older workers. Laws which prohibit age discrimination should be thoroughly examined to ensure they meet the needs of our society.
2. Education and training programs should be readily available to older workers so they can keep their skills current, and learn technologies which make them competitive in the marketplace.
3. Job sharing and flexible schedules should be available to workers of all ages to meet the demands of family and caregiving responsibilities.
4. Encourage the development of transportation systems that are comprehensive and coordinated and meet the needs seniors and caregivers.

#### **Priority Issue # 5: Social Engagement**

As our society ages, and particularly as the baby boomers reach retirement years, questions are raised about how this segment of the population will change society. The most comprehensive approach to this issue is to look at what strategies are needed to change attitudes toward aging.

Barriers:

1. Aging is seen as a negative. As individuals we perpetuate this negativity through our words, actions and the way we adapt to the conditions of aging.
2. Our society perpetuates the negative images of aging through advertising and media.
3. Segments of the population are segregated from one another in programming, volunteer opportunities and education. This creates unnecessary generational divides and provides opportunities to perpetuate the stereotypes of aging.
4. Opportunities to volunteer need to be diverse to meet the skills and interests of every population.

### **Priority Issue # 5: Social Engagement, *continued***

- Barriers:
5. Not all employers encourage employees to explore volunteerism or offer incentives for employees to become active in their community. This may limit the pool of volunteers available as people are unaccustomed to volunteering once they retire.
  6. Individuals sometimes use age as an excuse to not learn something new.
- Solutions:
1. Each of us needs to take responsibility for the way we talk about aging and demonstrate a healthy, positive attitude towards the process. We each need to learn to adapt and cope with physical, mental and spiritual challenges in a positive manner. Aging sensitivity classes should be available as a deterrent to negativity about aging.
  2. As a society we should speak out against the negative stereotypes of aging perpetuated in advertising and the media. We should develop positive images of aging and market those aggressively.
  3. Volunteer opportunities should be multi-generational, rather than segmenting individuals into categories that are expected to appeal to a population. Centers should be created in the community that promote multi-generational interaction, rather than age specific programming. Opportunities for generations to learn about and from one another should be promoted in every community.
  4. Volunteer opportunities should be diverse to meet the needs of both episodic and long term volunteers and people of diverse skills and abilities.
  5. Employers should encourage volunteerism among workers to build a population of people accustomed to volunteering as they age. This will create a pool of volunteers that consider volunteerism the norm, not the exception.
  6. Each of us should take the opportunity to learn something new and encourage others around us to do the same.